

## P. E. VERNON

M.A., Ph.D., D.Sc., Professor of Educational Psychology, Institute of Education,  
University of London

# Race and Intelligence<sup>\*</sup>

THE TOPIC OF racial differences in intelligence has for long been a controversial one, probably because of its serious social and political implications. If it were proved, for example, that Negroes were poorer in innate ability than whites, there might be some justification for the latter regarding the former as relatively unfit for self-government, or for educational or vocational advance. This belief is indeed widely held, particularly in parts of Africa and of the United States. But it is contested by the majority of social anthropologists and psychologists on the ground that the observed intellectual inferiority of Negroes (and of other more primitive peoples such as Australian aborigines) may be largely due to their lack of educational opportunity and their socio-economic repression.

What then are the facts? There has been a tremendous amount of investigation, especially of Negroes in the United States; a recent book by A. M. Shuey surveys 170 studies in this area alone. For present purposes it will be sufficient to accept such broad distinctions as the Caucasian (European and North American white), the Negro and the Australasian without going into the tricky problem of just what constitutes a "race".

As early as 1918 group intelligence tests—the Army Alpha (verbal) or Army Beta (pictorial)—were applied to nearly two million American recruits, who were classified by country of origin or descent. White recruits who were immigrants or descendants from most northern and western European countries all obtained similar average scores; those from southern and eastern countries were mostly somewhat lower, and Negroes were lower still,

their average corresponding to an intelligence quotient (I Q) of not much above 80: the average I Q for European and North American whites is defined as 100.

However, critics soon pointed out, first that the men tested were not necessarily representative samples of their countries. The western Europeans were more likely to be of early pioneering stock, whereas those from, say, the Balkans were poorer peasant immigrants. Secondly it was obvious that the obtained hierarchy of national intelligences corresponded closely with the degree of economic advancement and educational development. Many social scientists therefore jumped to the conclusion that the Army tests merely measured educational differences, and that the results could be attributed wholly to the effects of environment and upbringing. Actually, of course, they did not prove this explanation; it would be quite plausible to maintain that the higher-scoring national or racial groups, because of their higher intelligence, had achieved greater economic advance and better education.

Even more striking, though, than the group differences, were the individual differences within groups. In other words there was tremendous overlapping; at least 10 per cent of Negroes scored higher than the average white, and 10 per cent of whites lower than the average Negro. Later studies have confirmed this and have indeed revealed occasional Negroes ranging all the way up to I Q 180 and over, and whites down to 20 and below, though the proportions of such high and low scorers respectively are very small. Moreover there were, and are, marked differences in different parts of the country, Negroes in the northern states (largely urban) averaging some 10 points higher I Q than those in the south (largely rural). Indeed the average for northern Negro recruits was

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actually superior to that of whites in some of the southern states.

This of course raised the question of whether northern Negroes improved because their economic circumstances and education were more nearly similar to those of whites, or whether the brighter stocks were more apt to migrate from the south. O. Klineberg's famous investigation in New York City (1935) and Lee's similar research in Philadelphia (1951) indicated indeed that the longer the period of residence in a northern city, the higher the I Q. But in fact such increases amounted only to about 6 I Q points in all, and the highest level reached—I Q 87½ in New York—was still well below the white average of 100. Moreover, despite Klineberg's evidence to the contrary, later workers have discovered a distinct trend towards selective migration. Probably about half the north-south difference can be attributed to this.

Testing in other parts of the world has been on a much smaller scale. But mention should at least be made of S. D. Porteus's investigations with his test of tracing the most direct path through a maze—the maze is drawn in the form of a plan, rather like a children's puzzle. Here is a type of intelligence test having no apparent educational bias. Porteus has used it in many African communities, in Australia and Hawaii, and found marked variations, the average score for non-whites being considerably lower than that for whites. However, his groups were small, as the test must be given individually, and therefore doubtfully representative; and the differences are puzzling to anthropologists, since some of the most primitive peoples did better than others relatively culturally advanced.

Apparently, however, the lowest scoring groups were those which had had least access to any kind of educational facility. It may be, too, that Australian aborigines did somewhat better than expected because of the resemblance of the task to tracking with which their culture is familiar. Thus here also the results are complicated by possible environmental effects, and similar objections can be raised against other researches using all kinds of test materials.

Most psychologists would nowadays agree that no tests are, or can be, "culturally neutral".

Scores on tests involving verbal reasoning are naturally somewhat dependent on education. When tests based on pictures or practical tasks (performance tests) are used, differences between national or racial groups are often diminished, though they do not by any means disappear. But surely it is obvious that the British or American white child gets far more experience with pictures, blocks and puzzles similar to such tests than does the southern-state Negro or the Australian aboriginal child. For example, it has been noted that some African peoples cannot readily recognize drawings of familiar objects or animals on paper, though they carve just the same shapes on ivory or leather.

But over and above these handicaps, psychologists realize that test performance depends considerably on motivation or attitude. The white middle-class child is brought up to answer questions or carry out tasks quickly, by individual effort. The Negro or more primitive child approaches such a test situation in quite a different frame of mind and does not see the point of it; his culture may, for instance, stress group consultation rather than individual competition. Important differences of this kind have been brought out by Davis's and Havighurst's sociological studies of child-rearing practices in America, and by Biesheuvel's observations of Africans in the Union.

We are forced to conclude, then, that the question of genuine racial differences in intelligence cannot be answered. For whether we use formal tests, or whether we observe the cultural achievements of different groups, the results are always going to depend as much on the whole upbringing and environment as on innate potentialities. One might indeed go further and say that the whole controversy rests on a confusion of terms. The layman insists on using the word intelligence in two radically different senses. On the one hand he thinks of it as "native wit"—the capacity of the brain to build up intellectual abilities, which is ultimately determined by the genes. On the other hand he describes people as intelligent when in daily life, at school or in employment, they can comprehend, reason, learn and judge effectively. And such abilities, we now realize, although they are based funda-

mentally on innate brain potentiality, only develop in so far as they are stimulated by upbringing, and they develop very differently with different kinds and amounts of stimulus. Our tests measure intelligence in the second sense quite successfully, and indeed do a useful job in revealing differences in those intellectual capacities which are valued by white middle-class culture. But we are not entitled to infer from them to differences in genetically-determined potentiality, when conditions of upbringing have been very diverse.

At the same time, the pendulum may well have swung too far towards environmentalistic explanations. The existence of genetic differences has not been disproved, even if it has not been securely proved. But many American researches have endeavoured more or less successfully to compare whites and Negroes

of similar education and similar socio-economic status; yet I Q differences still persist. It is noteworthy too that these differences are smallest with younger, pre-school children, and tend to become more marked when older children and young adults are tested in powers of abstract reasoning. Thus it is a plausible hypothesis that they may be somewhat lacking in the genes that underly these intellectual functions.

Yet even if we regard this hypothesis as reasonable, we should not forget the very great degree of overlapping. It may be that relatively few Negroes or members of other more primitive societies are capable of the highest intellectual development even in favourable environments, but some are. And there is certainly no justification for assuming that any one race should be wholly differentiated from any other on the ground of a universal inferiority.

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